1 Introduction

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1.1. What do we mean by slavery?

Slavery is often described as an institution, but logically prior to this it is a power relationship, whereby some human beings exercise effective control and exploitation over others. As we suggest in the Preface, that does not in itself distinguish it from other types of exploitation, and the study of slavery necessarily implies multiple approaches taken together.[1] Slavery thus has both social and economic dimensions as well as legal, and indeed it usually coexists with other possible relationships of subordination, from which it may or may not be sharply distinguished. Societies differ in how and to what degree slavery is institutionalised: ancient states typically regulated slavery as part of their overall control of the population, through taxation and maintenance of order, as well as through their legal systems. And even within a single slave system, slavers may use the institution for a wide variety of purposes, while the enslaved may by various means negotiate circumstances that vary from any theoretical norms. The combination of the agency of both slavers and enslaved means that slavery might have greatly different effects depending on place and time. In the societies documented in this volume, we can observe this variation most closely in the texts of the Roman Imperial period, but it is at work throughout.

From the New Kingdom onwards, slaves figure in legal documents that transfer ownership, including sales, but we do not have any evidence of slavery as a focus of legal and governmental regulation until the Ptolemaic and Roman periods (see particularly **5.2**). Indeed, the earliest evidence from the pharaonic period tends to illuminate the hierarchical relationship between dependent persons and those who controlled their labour and productivity, rather than use technical terms for the legal status of the dependents or even a sense of ownership (**2.4**). In fact, dependence is a central theme in Chapter 2, as it was a major structuring element in pharaonic society, perhaps more than in any succeeding period. And yet it is clear that at least by the first millennium there are sales of people that are genuine property transactions (**3.1**), and the Aramaic sources confirm this

1 We owe much to Vlassopoulos 2021, who gives a helpful historiography of the study of ancient slavery as well as laying out a properly historical approach, or rather combination of approaches.

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fact (**3.3.1**). To delineate the exact parameters of this change in the position of slavery will be one of the major themes of the book.

Before we begin to do so, however, we need to acknowledge that even to talk about slavery imposes a concept of human relations that reflects the experiences and values of numerous world societies over the past several millennia – concepts, experiences, and values that ancient peoples cannot be assumed to have shared. An ideology of equality – something prevalent, if hardly universal or uniform, in modern societies – was not one shared by most people before the last few centuries. However repugnant slavery and other forms of dependence are to modern sensibilities, we cannot assume that they were equally repellent to ancient minds. There is certainly evidence from pharaonic Egypt of a positive view of dependent status, even of active seeking of it (**23**), because the alternatives were worse. It is hard to know how far such evidence is coloured by the filter of the views of the possessing classes, a caution that extends to a high proportion of all our evidence for antiquity. But it is likely that processes of socialisation created societies in which hierarchy was widely accepted as a fact of life and valued as an element of stability (**2.3**). On the other hand, slavery itself is not generally seen as a positive status for those enslaved (e.g. **3.3**).

In this Introduction, we aim to sketch a number of the main questions about slavery that arise both from the texts presented here and from the broader scholarly literature about slavery and dependence. Our goal is not a synthesis of the subject, which remains a vast area of lively controversy, but a statement of themes that the reader will want to keep in mind in reading the chapters that follow, along with some basic information that may help in interpreting the documents. (More help is provided by a section 'Aids for the reader' and a Glossary at the front of the book.) We have also tried to give a sense of the questions that do not readily find answers in the documents and other evidence available to us, and why that might be the case. It will become apparent that this documentation is highly variable from one period to another, with different types of evidence informing us about some subjects and not others at different times (compare, e.g. **7.3.1** and **7.4.1**). A common theme in the documentation across periods, however, is the difficulty of seeing slavery from the perspective of the enslaved. Most of our texts were produced by the wealthier and more powerful parts of their societies. Even when we see behaviour that suggests slave agency at work, we almost always see it from the point of view of the masters or of state institutions that the ruling class controlled. All attempts to come to a balanced view of slavery are doomed to frustration by this bias in the evidence. Nonetheless, it is important to keep looking for signposts to the values, aspirations, and actions of the enslaved, which can sometimes be found by reading the documents against the grain. That is one reason why a collection of ancient texts has a value beyond any synthetic account.

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One pointer to the variability of slavery is the terminology used to refer to slaves. It will quickly become apparent that a recurrent theme in our texts is the difficulty of pinning down the meaning of words for 'slave' and 'free', not to mention statuses that do not easily correspond to those concepts. Modern vocabulary is highly shaped by the heritage of Greek and Latin terms, particularly the precision of Roman legal terminology. But even in Greek there are terms that seem to reflect a dependent relationship much more than a legal status, and the same is true in other languages ranging from Hebrew to Coptic (e.g. **4.1.2**, **7.3.2**). In early pharaonic Egypt it is not even clear that there was any distinct concept of freedom or a word for 'free' (**2.2.5**). But by the New Kingdom the term *nemehu* is used in contrast to *bak* in a fashion that suggests an absence of dependence, except on the king, and *nemehu* is still in use for this purpose in Egyptian-language texts of the Ptolemaic period (**5.5** and **174**). In the Aramaic sources, too, we find vocabulary for freedom (**3.3.7**). Direct translation is thus difficult, and where it is uncertain we have tried to indicate the ancient terms in parentheses after the translation. This is perhaps visually distracting, but we believe that many readers will find these indications helpful as they try to form their own views about situations and texts. They may also discern more clearly the seemingly recurrent process through which terms for 'slave' are replaced by new euphemisms, which in turn become too stark and are succeeded by new ones (see e.g. **3.2.1**, **5.5**). And in the multilingual society of Egypt from the first millennium BCE on, influence from one language on another needs to be considered (again, e.g. **5.5**).

Until the publication of Orlando Patterson's *Slavery and Social Death: A Comparative Study* (1982) forty years ago, slavery was most commonly defined in legal terms: the slave is a human being who is also an item of property, the possession of another person (or persons). This definition ultimately stemmed from Aristotle's concise formulation, 'A slave is an animate piece of property' (*Politics* 1253b32). Such a definition works reasonably well, as Patterson acknowledges, for societies with legal systems that have clearly developed notions of property and ownership rights, particularly ancient Rome and the areas influenced by Roman legal thinking, including Roman and Late Roman Egypt. Patterson, however, suggests that the concept of property is too open-ended to be useful from a cross-cultural perspective and that it fails to differentiate adequately what rights are specific to slavery as opposed to other interpersonal power relationships, such as the rights of employers over their workforces.[2] This critique of a property-based definition is valuable for orienting scholars' focus away from primarily legalistic approaches

2 Lewis 2017a. Lewis's defence of property-based definitions of slavery is persuasive. The right to labour, among others, is also a form of property. But property is not by itself a sufficient description of slavery.

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to slavery, and towards emphasising also the intrinsic violence and dishonour produced by slavery, not only for the slaves and slave owners themselves, but that indirectly permeate the entire society to which they belong (see in more depth **1.5** below). Nevertheless, Patterson's approach has come in for criticism as being too directed at finding an essential character to slavery across societies – that is, for being ahistorical.[3] It also oversimplifies the notion of what constitutes property.

The status of the slave has an innate ambiguity of being simultaneously a person and an object belonging to another person; we see this in the Roman legal handbooks, which discuss slavery under both property law and the law of persons. From this ambiguity stems the central paradox of slavery: however insistently slaves are treated as chattels, much of their value and usefulness as property derives from the fact of their personhood, with the capacity, when required, to take the initiative and think for themselves, and to form relationships, both with other slaves and with their masters and their families. All these aspects our book seeks to explore in depth (again, see **1.5** below). Indeed, the monetary value of a slave was to a considerable degree dependent on this capacity for agency.

Another aspect of this paradox is whether slaves are regarded as intrinsically incapable of exhibiting moral qualities or not. If they were not, the prevalence of manumission in Roman society becomes problematic.[4] We must be alert for cases throughout our sources where slaves' moral qualities are presupposed or alluded to, whether in positive or in negative terms, or, conversely, where they are thought not to exhibit the capacity for moral judgement. The pharaonic sources originating in the office-holding population, for example, treat slaves in the same way as they do the mass of the lower strata of the population. These sources privilege the maintenance of a proper hierarchy but they do not assign slaves a lower character than other dependent groups.

Patterson's approach also eliminated the unfortunate notion that only five true slave societies have existed in world history, a view that drove a conceptual wedge between Greece and Rome and the rest of the ancient Mediterranean and Near East, not to speak of many other societies in the global history of slavery.[5] While one purpose of our book is to trace how Egypt absorbed Greek and Roman practices regarding slavery, including – among other fundamental changes – the significant increase in the number of slaves as a proportion of the population, the book will equally highlight some elements of long-term continuity, and parallels and resemblances between one period and another, especially in relation to the

3 See the trenchant remarks of Vlassopoulos 2021, esp. 7–9, 30.

4 Mouritsen 2011: ch. 2 '*Macula servitutis*: slavery, freedom, and manumission'. The relatively low status and political disabilities attached to freedman status diminished in subsequent generations.

5 Cf. Lewis 2017b: 206 n. 64.

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slave trade and sources of slaves (see **1.4** below), and occupations (**1.7** below). Even such areas as the religious life of slaves and naming practices display long-term continuities where the evidence allows us to chart this.

Recently Kostas Vlassopoulos has argued that Aristotle's treatment of slavery as a relationship of property was not in fact the standard ancient Greek understanding of slavery, which held that it was a relationship of dominance. This explains why the words *doulos*, *douleuein* ('slave', 'to be a slave'), etc. are frequently applied to the subjects of empires, whether of Athens or Persia, and even to a person's subjection to the power of uncontrollable emotion; these usages, Vlassopoulos argues, are not metaphorical, but expressive of conditions under which huge discrepancies of power deprive people of their autonomy, their *eleutheria* (for more on the vocabulary of slavery, see **1.3** below).[6] Thus *doulos* and its cognates can encompass not only chattel slavery but serfdom and other forms of unfreedom and dependence involving one person's subjugation to another. But as we shall see, the force of *doulos* and the contexts in which it is used evolve, and we cannot apply the traditional understanding of the classical texts to later evidence without critical scrutiny.

1.2. Slavery and other forms of dependence

One of this book's main themes is thus the exploration of the varied forms of subjugation involved in ancient Egyptian slavery. What do we mean by slaves and dependents, and how do we distinguish them from other forms of personal dependence or subordination? The Roman jurist Gaius (*Inst.* 1.9) said that 'The principal distinction in the law of persons is that all persons (*homines*) are either free or slaves (*servi*)'; but in practice, as opposed to law, even in Roman society there existed a range of situations and relationships, and in the earlier periods treated in this book we cannot apply Roman conceptions of status, let alone those of more modern slave societies, without question.

We will therefore want to keep in mind this fundamental question: What is distinctive about slavery, and how does it shade into other forms of exploitation?[7] At the same time, this question is itself problematic in periods for which we have no normative or theoretical sources; the distinction may be a modern obsession the Egyptians did not share. Although slaves characteristically have no contractual

6 Vlassopoulos 2011. Compare the use of *doulos* in the late antique papyri when addressing social superiors, which strictly is also more than just a metaphor (**6.1**); this usage is seen already with *ʿbd* in Aramaic, **3.3.1**. Similarly, the use of slave vocabulary in describing the relationship of humans to a god embodies the same relational element (e.g. in Hebrew, **4.4**).

7 On theories of exploitation, see de Ste Croix 1981. For a long-term approach to the interaction of slavery and other forms of exploitation, see Eltis and Engerman 2011: 1–21.

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agreement with their masters or stipulated cash remuneration for their labour, in some circumstances, such as debt slavery, they do enter into an agreement, and in any case they receive rations for their sustenance. Such contracts are to be distinguished from labour contracts entered into by free persons, and yet they may at times seem very similar.[8] Labour contracts may have clauses requiring the employee to stay with the employer (the Greek *paramone*), making their situation seem less than entirely free. On the other hand, slaves are also sometimes allowed some working capital and remuneration for their labour, building up a personal fund the Romans called *peculium*. Slaves might, moreover, live and work somewhere other than the owner's home or estate, particularly in wealthier households with far-flung properties (see **138**). In any case, it was usually in the master's interest to keep slaves alive and fit for productive work. Some slaves may therefore have achieved a better standard of living than many free wage workers or peasants.

Ancient societies had a vast array of other forms of exploitation and dependence. A full exploration of these situations would take us too far afield, but we list here a number of them to help the reader see just how pervasive such relationships were.

– Work imposed on the population at large or on a large part of it (*corvée* labour), often with exemptions for privileged classes. This labour was typically limited to a particular task or a specified period of time and did not change the legal status of those performing it, but like most labour by enslaved persons it was not compensated. The requisitioned labour of the early Umayyad caliphate, although imposed more selectively by quotas on villages, belongs to this category (see **7.3.4.4**).
– The labour of prisoners (both criminals and prisoners of war), especially in mines and quarries (**5.4**). This might be time-limited, at least for some (there is evidence in a papyrus of 209 CE (*SB* 1.4639) for the release of convicts after five years). But some prisoners of war were enslaved, and the distinction between these and prisoners serving limited terms is not always evident.
– Work by dependent tenants. Tenants in Egypt occupied a wide variety of statuses in different periods, including in the pharaonic period (**2.4**), some of them protected by government action (particularly the royal farmers (*basilikoi georgoi*) of the Ptolemaic period), and yet we can find slaves in the position of tenants (e.g. the Syrian *paides* and their families working for

8 Contracts for 'perpetual' servitude that are in fact time-limited pose this conundrum in a direct way; see **71–75** for the complexities.

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Zenon, see **5.3**). A special problem is posed by the registered cultivators (*georgoi enapographoi*) in the Byzantine sources (see **7.2**).

– Labour carried out under work contracts. Although nominally free, this can shade into virtual slavery at moments where the power relationship between employer and employee is so strongly in the employer's favour that the employee has almost no freedom of action. The institution of obligatory residence (*paramone*), referred to earlier, was often involved in such unbalanced relationships (see **6.9**).
– Debt slavery in various forms.[9] Debt bondage results from pledging oneself (or one's child, wife, or slave) to secure a debt: the creditor does not acquire full ownership rights over the debtor or substitute, but only the person's services until the debt is paid off, whereupon the arrangement ceases. *Paramone* represents one form of debt bondage. But when free persons are legally permitted to secure loans on their own person, or that of their child or wife, and the loan cannot be repaid, the creditor(s) can seize the debtor as their slave, acquiring full property rights over the debtor without time limit, to sell or otherwise use as they wish. This sort of enslavement for debt was abolished in Athens by Solon, and it is absent from the Aramaic sources (**3.3.2**). Diodorus (1.97.3) claims that it had already been abolished in Egypt by Bocchoris, but this may not be historical (see **3.1** with **93**).[10] It was permitted in Ptolemaic Syria after 260 BCE only for debts to the Crown (not private debts: *C.Ord.Ptol.* 22, **133**), but this ordinance stems from a particular historical circumstance, and it is not clear just how far it had general applicability or was in force in Egypt. It seems clear that enslavement for debts to the Crown was also practised in Egypt under the Ptolemies.[11] Enslavement as a result of non-payment of debts incurred between private individuals is more controversial, but this also seems to have existed, even if restricted by the protection of some groups within the population.[12]
– Self-sale and sale or leasing of children is known, and in practice the apprenticing, pledging, and leasing of child labour merge into one another.

9 See below, **2.9**, **3.2.1**, **3.3.2**, **5.3**, **5.4**, **6.3**. For the distinction between debt bondage and enslavement for debt, see Harris 2002; see also Westbrook and Jasnow 2001, esp. chs. by Jasnow and Manning. The distinction suggested by Harris is not always tidy. If the debt bondsman could not clear the debt, the one could slide into the other. Unless (as in the laws of Hammurabi, and in Jewish law) the law prescribes a time limit after which the debt becomes void, the debt bondsman risks slipping into permanent servitude, *de facto* if not juridically.

10 Markiewicz 2005, 2008.

11 Bieżuńska-Małowist 1974: 37.

12 Bieżuńska-Małowist 1974: 38.

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Such forms of dependency may be prompted by debt, but not necessarily.[13] A special case is formed by self-sale to a temple or other forms of binding of the self to a temple, as in the case of 'sacred slaves' (*hierodouloi*) and 'detainees' (*katochoi*) (see **166–167**, **173–174**). In late antiquity we find donations of children, or self-sales, to monasteries, raising interesting questions about whether these are functionally equivalent to earlier forms of temple dependence, or just superficially similar (see **7.3.4.3**).

– Finally, the obligations created by slavery did not entirely end with the freeing of a slave through emancipation. Freedmen and freedwomen were recognised as having a distinct status under the Greek and Roman legal systems, but it is not to be assumed that this was the case in other periods. Emancipation was normal in Roman Egypt, but again this cannot be taken as normative in other periods, even the Ptolemaic. The Greek term for freedman (*apeleutheros*), equivalent to the Latin *libertus*, does not appear in the papyri before the reign of Augustus, and there is no alternative Greek term for 'freedman' in the Ptolemaic period. (Comparative studies distinguish slave systems which allow frequent emancipation as 'open', as opposed to 'closed'; cf. **1.8** below.) And in most cases freed slaves did continue to owe some services to their former masters, who were now, in Roman terms, their 'patrons'.[14] There are signs that newly freed persons and their former masters sometimes held conflicting ideas as to what those duties were (*P.Oxy.Hels.* 26). The situation after the Arab conquest was again different, and the nature of the relationship between patron and client (*mawlā*) was very distinct from its Roman counterpart (**7.4.5**).

1.3. Calling a slave a slave – or not: vocabularies of slavery and dependence

The texts of which we give translations in this book use a wide variety of words to refer to slaves and other dependents. As we have said, we cannot assume that these words have meanings and semantic connotations identical to those of 'slave' or any other English word. Nor can we take it for granted that the meanings of these terms were unchanged over centuries of use in their own languages. Some words may even have been useful because of their lack of legal precision. Outside of certain legal documents, exact terminology was usually unimportant to those who wrote our texts. Readers will find that questions of terminology are raised in

13 Ramin and Veyne 1981; Vuolanto 2003. Cf. the ninety-nine-year service contract of a woman in **168**, and the controversy over whether this constitutes a kind of self-sale.

14 For Greek freedmen and freedwomen, see Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005.

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each chapter. These should not be seen as technical diversions from the substance: terminological issues are substantive ones. Some words are used as synonyms for others, either for other words in the same phase of the language, or for words in different languages (e.g. Demotic Egyptian or Coptic compared with Greek). We will also try to bring out how both preferences for particular terms and their various meanings change over time, and to see what influences drive this evolution, including the contemporary use of other languages.

Even within a single language, the chronological development of the use of terminology can be very complicated. It is not always immediately evident whether this variation over time reflects fashions in usage or substantive change in society. Some words certainly have multiple possible meanings; of these the most important in Greek is *pais*, which can mean 'slave' or '(male) child' and is found hundreds of times in the Greek papyri.[15] *Hemhal* in Demotic and Coptic has a similar valence, like *puer* in Latin and, indeed, 'boy' in English in some contexts. Even the normal technical term for 'slave', Greek *doulos* and its variants, has a complicated history in the papyri: though not uncommon in the Ptolemaic papyri, it occurs less frequently than less formal terms such as *paidarion*, *pais*, and *paidiske*; but from the start of the Roman period and for three centuries, it overwhelms all alternative words for slave, contributing to the impression scholars have formed of the explicitness of our evidence for slavery in the Roman period. In the fourth and fifth centuries, the vocabulary becomes more evenly mixed again. But this shift may reflect not so much a change in meaning or in the prevalence of slavery as a reflection of different rates of production and survival of particular types of documents: one term may have been perceived as appropriate for legal documents or official declarations, when others served in more informal contexts where legal precision was unimportant. From the fifth century CE on, an increasing number of occurrences are semi-metaphorical (see n. 6 above), expressing the writer's social inferiority in relation to the master (*despotes*), a phenomenon not limited to Greek. But the legal sense does not disappear: even in the seventh century we find literal meanings of *doulos* in legal contracts (for example, the sale of a Nubian slave, **247**).

Where legal precision is not essential, writers may use vocabulary that emphasises a dependent relationship rather than status. As we have seen, this phenomenon can be observed in all of the periods and languages covered in this book. Words for favoured slaves, moreover, may downplay the element of servitude; examples are Greek *threptos*, normally meaning a child rescued from abandonment and brought up in the household, typically as a slave, or *therapon* ('server'). The Greek term *oikogenes* ('house-born') in the papyri is commonly used to

15 Quenouille 2012.

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identify a slave's origin factually, without any value-laden connotations; in this respect it stands in contrast to the Latin use of *verna* for house-born slaves, which expresses a closer emotional bond than other terms.[16]

Latin had a means of identifying slaves without using any explicit word for their status: it simply gave the name of their owner in the genitive (possessive) case immediately after the slave's name. This practice came into occasional use in Greek in the earliest years of Roman rule and can be found from time to time in Roman-influenced contexts. For example, in **182** (26 BCE, Soknopaiou Nesos), we read with strings of genitives that someone 'has leased a cow from Anteros, (slave) of Gn. Pompeius Poros'. And in *BGU* 4.1118 (22 BCE, written in Alexandria), 'from Aesop son of Eros (slave or freedman) of Caesar'. As the second example suggests, we cannot always be sure if the construction refers to a slave or to a freedman, omitting the proper Greek term for a freed person, *apeleutheros*. In general, however, we may take such constructions as referring to slaves. Because Greek used the genitive construction also for giving the name of a person's father (or mother), care is needed in distinguishing owners from parents. Much simpler possessive constructions can also refer to enslaved persons in an informal fashion, as in *P.Oxy.* 76.5100 (136 CE, Oxyrhynchos), a private letter that mentions a letter to be conveyed to the governor (*strategos*) of the Prosopite nome 'through your Aithiopian',[17] with 'slave' understood. Where we are dealing with private letters, rather than legal documents, status terms were in any case unnecessary, and enslaved persons could be referred to only by name, leaving us searching for clues to their status (e.g. **7.4.1**).

1.4. Sources of slaves

In most cases, slaves are referred to in our texts (of all periods) without any indication of how they came to be enslaved. But sales and registrations of slaves usually supply at least information about previous ownership, and for the Roman period, census declarations are also useful. There has been much controversy over the relative quantitative importance of the various sources of slaves in different periods; what is most certain is that this must have varied considerably from time to time and even episodically within the different periods covered here. The most irregular source was surely capture in war, which was intermittently of great

16 Rawson 2010. For the meanings of *threptos*, see Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005: 175, summarising A. Cameron.

17 We use 'Aithiopian' rather than 'Ethiopian' because the Greek word did not refer to people from the area of modern Ethiopia, but to people from the area south of the first cataract of the Nile in general.

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importance but could be negligible in peacetime. It was clearly intentional and of demonstrable importance in the second millennium BCE, however (**2.3.2**), and certainly produced some major influxes of slaves in the early Ptolemaic period, for example, but it is difficult to identify later. Internal rebellions were also an episodic source of captives for enslavement, as no mercy needed to be shown to captured rebels (**2.5**; **135**). And piracy, too, was an intermittent opportunity for enslavement (cf. **5.3**).

The enslaved population of Egypt was, as far as our evidence allows us to see, drawn in pre-Roman periods to a large degree from external sources. Egypt was an importer of slaves, particularly from Syria and Nubia. Under the pharaohs, this seems to a large extent to have been the product of warfare (**2.3.2**). This may also have been true in the early Ptolemaic period, and almost certainly more prevalent then than it was under the Romans, but that impression may stem partly from activity traceable in the third-century BCE Zenon archive than from any more solid base. The early Islamic period also witnessed extensive enslavement through warfare (**7.4.2**). Slaves from Nubia, and perhaps farther south in the Nile Valley, are commonly attested, although there is no indication that they formed a majority of the enslaved population in any period. In periods later than those covered in this book, there was an active slave trade across the Sahara and running through the oases of Egypt's Western Desert. There is no clear evidence for the use of these routes in antiquity, but there is good reason to see long-term continuity in African slaving routes at least along the Nile Valley and via maritime routes from the Horn of Africa, modern Ethiopia, Djibouti, and Eritrea (**7.3.4**).[18]

Just how the slave trade was organised is hard to say of any period. Our documentation tends to privilege individual transactions between persons rather than any professionalised trade, and there are few references to professional slave traders and no explicit evidence for organised slave markets. And yet both of these must have existed in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods and later, at least at Alexandria, and possibly also Memphis (**149**).[19] No doubt the absence of extensive papyrus documentation from Alexandria has biased the record against our seeing any large-scale merchandising of enslaved persons. Certainly professional slave traders are more visible in the Arabic documents than in earlier periods (**7.4.2**); under Arab rule there was an active slave market in Fusṭāṭ, but whether these professional trading ventures should be seen as the forerunners of the medieval trans-Saharan traffic or simply a surfacing of a phenomenon present all along but previously undocumented is hard to say. Even in periods where we have evidence

18 Cf. Alexander 2001.

19 Straus 2004: 243, 301–313; Harper 2011: 83–99; Bodel 2005.

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for professional slave dealing, most transactions seem to have involved people in the personal networks of the buyers or sellers.

Many individuals were enslaved at birth by being born to slave women. These did not generate sale documents unless they were subsequently sold to a different owner, but their parentage is often referred to in the census declarations of the Roman period (written in Greek). How far the servile population reproduced its numbers over generations is hard to know, and the proportion of slaves born of slave mothers is a matter of debate.[20] We believe that in the Roman period, and perhaps already under the Ptolemies, this was a major source of slaves, probably the single most important. But it is difficult to say if this was true in earlier periods or constitutes a novelty under Greek and Roman rule. Nor is it entirely clear if this pattern was sustained in late antiquity, although much evidence suggests continuity from earlier periods of Roman rule.

One crucial point that supports this view of slave reproduction in the Roman period is the male-to-female ratio in the census declarations. It looks as if about two-thirds of slaves were female, a point of importance for many aspects of slavery; in the present context, it points to a deliberate strategy of maximising the potential for in-house breeding of slaves. The more girls and women there were among the slave population, the more children would be born into slavery. (A preponderance of female slaves in the household could of course have served other purposes, including help with housework and textile production.) The later age of emancipation for female slaves found in the Roman period (see below) also supports such a strategy. The Ptolemaic census documents give the same ratio, suggesting that it was a constant of Greek-style slavery in Egypt (**5.3**). And female slaves outnumber male in pharaonic documentation as well (**2.4**). Ancient military campaigns, however, often killed men and enslaved women and children; this too could lead to a skewed sex ratio in the servile population. There is also excellent evidence for the Roman period for the practice of picking up abandoned infants 'from the dung heap', and of raising them as slaves. These were predominantly female, because a preference for male children led to the exposure of more girl babies. But once again we cannot say how far this pattern was also present in other periods; indeed more male slaves than female, by a ratio of about 3.5:1, appear in the Aramaic documents, although archival influences are probably responsible (**3.3.5**); we have only two significant (but very incommensurate) sources of relevant Aramaic texts from Egypt.

We cannot know whether slavery for debt was, even if permitted, ever a significant source of new slaves, but there is little documentation for this (possible cases are **150** and **151**). More difficult still to assess is kidnapping of freeborn people and

20 Harris 1999; Scheidel 1997, 2011; cf. McKeown 2007, ch. 6.

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the subjection of these to enslavement, which certainly existed in the pharaonic period (**2.3.2**, and see **80**). We sometimes find allegations of such seizures in petitions and letters, but it is hard to evaluate these claims, which may simply reflect disagreements over legal status. The Ptolemaic and Roman administrations tried to ensure that written proofs were available for the legal status of all enslaved persons; such proof clearly depended on how someone had been enslaved, whether through capture, birth, or some other source.[21] But disputes were not rare; a fragmentary letter of the sixth or seventh century CE describes a husband's trip to Alexandria to see the bishop and to try to get clear evidence to free his wife, who had been 'snatched' into slavery.[22] Governments also placed restrictions on who could be enslaved; for example, Alexandrians could not be enslaved by other Alexandrians (see **1.9** below), and the Ptolemies were concerned to maintain their revenues by protecting royal farmers from enslavement. In many cases, however, matters might be unclear, and problems were unavoidable, especially over foundling children (whose free parentage might later emerge), victims of war capture and kidnapping, and the consequences of emancipation (which often left half-siblings with different statuses).[23]

The practice of emancipation certainly affected the composition of the slave population in a variety of ways. We have quantitative information only for the Roman period, thanks mainly to the census declarations. These show that virtually all male slaves were freed by their early thirties. That would have allowed many of them to marry and have families, so that the wider population would have included a considerable number of free descendants of slaves, even if they are not readily identifiable in most cases. Women, on the other hand, were typically freed only a decade or so later, when their reproductive years were over, a habit undoubtedly found in earlier periods, too, even if not readily demonstrable.[24] The deliberate use of slave reproduction to replenish the enslaved population is clearly visible here. But this habit also meant that far fewer female slaves would have been able to form families after emancipation. Even so, the combined effects of the emancipation policies would have been to keep the enslaved population relatively young and reduce the need for owners to use their resources to support an older and probably less productive slave population. On the other hand, in most cases

21 We may simply lack relevant documents for other periods; we find inheritance carefully documented in **82**, for example, and the ability to sell and bequeath goes back to pharaonic practice (**2.6**).

22 *SB* 3.6097, translated in *Law and Legal Practice* 9.1.2; it is written on the back of a fragmentary Coptic text and is to be dated to the sixth or seventh century, as Crum indicated in *P.Lond.Copt.* 1.476.

23 Well discussed by Evans-Grubbs 2013.

24 Bagnall and Frier 1994: 70–71.

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we do not know how far freed slaves continued to live in the household and help with the needs of their former owners, even in the absence of a formal obligation to do so. Both legal and informal claims on freedpersons' labour are documented in the Arabic documents (**7.4.5**). Such obligations are, in fact, attested as early as we find cases of emancipation (e.g. **5**).

1.5. Were slaves deracinated 'non-persons'?

Slavery, in its Roman form and in many other societies, invests the owner not with merely the slave's labour, but with every aspect of his/her person, including (and, as the reproductive strategy described above shows, especially) the slave's sexual activities; even the slave's name can be changed by the owner's fiat (see more below in this section, p. 24). This is a prime reason why Patterson in *Slavery and Social Death* rejects definitions of slavery as a form of property in favour of a fourfold definition that emphasises this broader control: 'the permanent, violent domination of natally alienated and generally dishonoured persons'.[25] Permanence is one of the main elements distinguishing slavery from, for example, servitude for debt and any form of contractual service. But its inclusion in the very definition of slavery is dubious, given the possibility in some slave societies – for Egypt, already under the Persians and above all under the Romans – of emancipation. But emancipation was not by any means a universal practice, and there is no evidence that the practice of emancipating practically all slaves that we find in Roman Egypt was true of earlier periods, although grants of freedom were at least common in the Greek world in the Hellenistic period and perhaps earlier still.

Patterson's attention to violence, on the other hand, is a useful reminder when looking at the Egyptian evidence for slavery, precisely because violence only occasionally surfaces in that evidence, which simply takes for granted the rights of owners to exercise violent domination over their slaves. We must be alert to the potential violence intrinsic in all master–slave relationships, even where this subsists beneath the surface of our texts. Other relationships of dependence may also have entailed some degree of potential violence; this, too, is rarely visible.

1.5.1. Deracination

The remaining two parts of Patterson's definition are more complex and prompt fuller discussion: (1) deracination, and finally (2) loss of the slave's honour (the most unexpected and controversial element of Patterson's definition). In doing so,

25 Cf. the reviews by Cruz-Uribe 1986 and Heinen 1988; also Shaw 1998; and most recently, Bodel and Scheidel 2017; relevant insights also in Brown 2009 and Harper 2011: *passim*.

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we should keep in mind that we do not follow him in rejecting the concept of property as central to ancient slavery. Nor do we look at these questions with any assumption that they must be universal parts of slave systems; as always, we should be alert to historical change and variation.

The slave's deracination from an acknowledged family and other social relationships has become axiomatic. As Peter Garnsey has put it, 'The slave was kinless, stripped of his or her old social identity in the process of capture, sale and deracination, and denied the capacity to forge new bonds of kinship through marriage.'[26] It is therefore worth considering in what respects Egyptian slaves in different periods could be described as 'deracinated' or standing outside society, but conversely, also the various mechanisms for their social integration. Certainly slaves captured in wars or rebellions were deracinated in a direct way, torn from their places of residence and their social contexts, implanted in new ones; this is visible particularly in periods when the capture of prisoners was a major, perhaps the major, source of slaves. That was apparently true in the pharaonic period, perhaps especially in the New Kingdom, as can be seen in **2.3.2** and **2.9** (and see **3.1** on renaming and stripping of parental names as a sign of deracination). When entire populations were transplanted and resettled in Egypt, deracination would have been less complete than when individuals were enslaved in Egyptian households. Trafficking of slaves from external sources such as Nubia and Syria, even in times of relative peace, would also have produced strong effects of deracination, which the renaming of an enslaved person (below, **1.5.5**) would only have reinforced. In contrast, children born to slave women and kept in the same household would have had very different experiences, without the thorough deracination suffered by captives, and in the Roman period at least census declarations suggest that slave offspring were generally kept with their mothers. Pharaonic texts, too, refer to slave women with their children, suggesting a similar pattern of behaviour.

But even in the Roman period, the social realities of slavery permitted – and even depended on – slaves' integration into families and social groupings in diverse ways – admittedly in general without the slave's consent, although voluntary friendships and associations are also documented. These are difficult to describe in any detail, because there was usually no reason for them to be recorded in writing. The social experiences of enslaved persons formed no part of the legal and financial documentation of any period, and private letters do not in general display any need to record the legal status of the sender, addressee, or other persons referred to. We are thus often in a position of guessing at who among those mentioned might have been a slave. Deracination was thus neither

26 Garnsey 1996: 1.

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absent from Egyptian slavery nor necessarily a majority experience in some periods. In pharaonic texts, there are signs that boundaries were permeable, even as there was anxiety about maintaining them (**2.7**).

1.5.1.1. Slaves and families

It is no easier to give a stable meaning to the word 'family' across different periods than it is to define 'slave'. The slave's most obvious family context was in most cases the larger household of the owner. This can be seen already in pharaonic documents (**2.4.2**, **2.7**). That relationship might last beyond a slave's formal emancipation, whether through legal restrictions, economic need, or even affection (**7.4.5**).

It is harder in most periods to see what we would think of as nuclear families involving slaves as spouses. Some societies seem to have been more comfortable recording the fact of such family groups, as we can see in the Aramaic documents from Elephantine (**3.3.9**). But in most later periods the legal categorisation of slaves denied them the ability to form legally recognised marriages or, in the case of men, to have children formally acknowledged as theirs. The standard Roman identification of slaves included reference to the mothers of 'house-born' slaves; the slave's paternity was unacknowledged, even if known, and this pattern is broadly true of earlier periods (see **2.7**). But in rare circumstances, not usually clear to us, even paternity was formally recorded, even if not legally valid in Greek and Roman societies (**163a**). For example, a slave consenting to his own sale in 517/16 BCE has a patronymic (*P.Tsenhor* 7–8).

Slaves could, at least in some circumstances, marry in the Judaean society of Elephantine (**3.3**, see **83** and **84**), perhaps an atypical situation. And even under the Romans we find a rare instance in Dioskoros, slave of Laberia, and his free-born 'wife' Alexous and their children, recorded in the census (117/18 CE, *P.Brux.* 1.19; translated and commented in *Law and Legal Practice* 9.2.4; cf. the family's poll tax receipts *P.Harr.* 2.180–189). In this case, the children were free, taking their mother's status as Roman law specified; this circumstance probably explains the appearance of the father's name. Although Roman law did not recognise marriages involving slaves, informal 'marriages' (*contubernia*) were common between slaves within the Roman household (*familia*), and sanctioned by the owner;[27] if the slaves were both manumitted, their relationships could be regularised as legal marriages (although children born previously were not necessarily also freed, and were certainly not legitimate). In the Ptolemaic period, the Syrian *paides* and their wives and *paidaria* (teenage children?) working on Apollonios' Philadelphian

27 Edmondson 2011; Evans-Grubbs 1993.

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gift-estate appear to have remained together as families despite their enslavement and physical displacement, presumably because it suited Apollonios for them to reproduce and raise their families: see *C.Ptol.Sklav.* 172 (*P.Col.Zen.* 2.87), 101 (*P.Cair.Zen.* 2.59292), and 124 (*P.Mich.* 1.49).

After manumission, marriage between a master and his freedwoman was legitimate under Roman law and socially acceptable, except for senators and their descendants, but this was not an issue in Egypt. Sexual relationships between female slave owners and their male slaves, in contrast, were more problematic (cf. **1.5.4.3** below on the *s.c. Claudianum*). We have hardly any way of determining what degree of genuine affection existed in these relationships.

More generally, it is hard to say, in large part because of the nature of our documentation, if true affection ever developed between slaves and their owners, or if the situation was always fatally undermined by the instrumental nature of their relationship. For example, in *P.Oxy.* 50.3555 (**226**) we read, 'My little house-born handmaid, whose name is Peina ('Pearl'), I loved and cared for as a little daughter in the hope that when she grew up I should have her as my nurse in old age, since I am a woman helpless and alone'; Peina's hand was crushed by a donkey. But we do not get Peina's point of view. Similar problems bedevil other archives, even where we get a fair amount of information about the relationships. Examples in the papyri are the veteran L. Bellienus Gemellus and his manager Epagathos (whose slave status is problematic: he may have begun as a slave and then been freed), or the *strategos* Apollonios' family and their slaves. Nor do we get much basis for seeing how far reciprocal affection between slave nurses and their free charges, or slave and free boys nursed and brought up together, actually existed.[28]

1.5.2. Access to various forms of social or religious association

In general, it seems likely that slaves participated in religious life as members of the households to which they belonged. Such a pattern of religious practice would leave few traces in our evidence.[29] Since in most cases the number of slaves in any given household was not large, it is unlikely that they formed any separate cultic organisation. Overall, indeed, it is striking how little evidence there is for slaves' involvement in religious practices and, consequently, how little the subject is discussed in the scholarly literature.[30] This lack of evidence is probably due to

28 Cf. Demosthenes 47.55–56: in old age a freed slave nurse returns to live in the house of an adult male whom she once nursed; see Joshel 1986 on Roman slave nurses for useful parallels.

29 For example, it seems that slaves were expected to participate in the sacrifice ordered by the emperor Decius along with other household members; cf. Luijendijk 2008: 171–172.

30 For example, the subject is absent from Bieżuńska-Małowist 1977, and 'slave' is absent from the index to Frankfurter 1998.

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the nature of the surviving religious documentation, in which the legal status of individuals is not recorded or perhaps of any significance. The archaeological and artistic evidence for religious practice, of course, in general comes to us with no indication of which individuals lie behind the objects and images we now have. Direct evidence for this integration into the household's religious life appears in the Arabic texts (**7.4.3**) and can be seen already in the Ptolemaic period (**157**). Although it is possible that the Quran's emphasis on religious equality had a positive impact in this area, it seems likely that this integration into family religious practice was not an innovation of the post-Islamic conquest period.

There is, however, some evidence from Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt for associations of slaves, however thin. In *SB* 3.7182 we find a fragmentary record of a 'club' of some sort that appears from the names to be one of slaves. Although undated, it belongs to the later Ptolemaic period. Varying numbers of members, from six to eight, assembled in humble locations such as a stable or granary several times a month and made contributions to a common treasury. Expenses included wine, a flute player, and a dancer, and sacrifice is mentioned; this may thus have been a religious association. The group had a president (*epimeletes*).[31] There are indications that they invited guests to their meetings, and that some of these may have been free, although the fragmentary character of the account makes it hard to be sure.

There is evidence from other regions in the Roman period for slaves participating together in social and religious associations.[32] The epigraphical record from Egypt does not give us any precise parallels for this phenomenon, but it can hardly be doubted that associations of the kind attested for the Ptolemaic period continued to exist. Participation in cultic organisations must also have been common. For example, Narkissos, freedman of Maron's sons at Tebtunis (*PSI* 8.915 etc.) must be the same person who contributed and voted in the guild of Harpochrates aged thirty-six (*P.Mich.* 5.246).[33] Common participation by slaves and freedmen was surely normal; it is documented for imperial slaves and freedmen in *BGU* 4.1137, from the early Roman period (see below).

There was certainly some consciousness of shared status and capability for common action.[34] There are a dozen occurrences of the term 'fellow slave' (*syndoulos*) in texts from the Augustan period to the seventh century CE, and the Latin equivalent *conservus* is how Phileros describes his correspondent Menander in

31 See Bieżuńska-Małowist 1974: 126–127 and Scholl, *C.Ptol.Sklav.* 1.91, for discussion and bibliography.

32 Bruun 2015.

33 Istasse 2001: 205.

34 Bagnall 2007.

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CPL 246 = *CEL* 1.3 (Abusir el-Meleq).[35] But occurrences of the Greek word are almost all either early Roman (and thus probably a new usage provoked by the Latin term) or very late in date, from the fourth to seventh century. It is difficult to know what to make of this pattern.

An entirely different kind of relationship between slavery and religion is the status of being, or the act of becoming, the slave of a god. This is particularly well documented in the Ptolemaic period, both in Demotic documents (see **173** and **174**) and in Greek texts (**166**). Exactly how we are to understand such situations is not easy to see, as our evidence portrays it in formal, external fashion rather than from the self-understanding of the people involved. How far such servitude to a god can be compared with the dedication of slaves to Christian monasteries in late antiquity (**7.3.4.3**, **273**) is even harder to say (see above under **1.2**).

1.5.3. Were slaves necessarily deprived of honour?

A slave's social identity derived from that of his/her owner. This was true of dependents more broadly, particularly in pharaonic Egypt with its strongly patrimonial social structure (**2.3**). The fact that the relational vocabulary of dependence was used for important officials, as servants of Pharaoh, just as it was for the servants of people at other levels, reinforces this point. There was no inherent dishonour in being in a position of dependence; to be outside the hierarchical networks of society was if anything more threatening. And some dependents occupied more self-directed niches in the economy than others (**2.4**). But those captured in war or raids to provide manpower for agriculture or crafts were undoubtedly treated in a utilitarian fashion and had much lower status. As slavery emerged as an identifiable institution over time, the negative view of slavery visible in first millennium texts begins to be more pronounced.

In Ptolemaic and Roman Egypt, not only slaves' social status but their tax category followed that of their masters. Even if the only social identity a slave possessed was being 'the slave of so-and-so', this surrogate identity conferred status, particularly in the acutely hierarchy-conscious society of the Roman Empire, including Roman Egypt. This fact meant not merely that the Roman slave cannot automatically be described as a deracinated outsider with no recognised place in society, but could even occupy positions of more power and influence – and hence potentially honour – than many of the humble freeborn population.

Slaves and freedmen of the Roman imperial household are the clearest cases (see especially *CPL* 248 = *CEL* 1.81, an official letter of introduction for an imperial slave). Their extensive responsibilities as high-ranking imperial bureaucrats

35 Cugusi's note (2001 [2004]) on line 1 merely notes the typicality of the name Phileros.

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(procurators) patently accrued considerable honour, reflected in the numerous inscriptions recording their activities. Although their achievements in a sense belonged to the emperor, it stretches logic to deny that the slaves and freedmen themselves also derived honour, just as equestrian procurators did, from their imperial service. Although the Roman literate classes affected to despise the imperial slaves' and freedmen's social inferiority, these slaves unquestionably ranked far above the ordinary *Aigyptioi*, themselves the butt of Roman literary disdain, on the social ladder.

More generally, since slave-owning was concentrated in the upper social strata, many slaves in Roman Egypt moved in higher social circles, and almost certainly enjoyed a better standard of living, than most of the free Egyptian population. In Ptolemaic Egypt, when both male and female slaves paid the salt tax (**138**), it was their owner's status that determined the rate, and in Roman Egypt, when female slaves were no longer liable, male slaves paid, or had paid for them, the poll tax which replaced this at the rate appropriate to their master's status. Thus slaves of Roman, Alexandrian, and Antinoopolite citizens, and of some Egyptian priests, were totally exempt, while slaves of residents of the nome capitals (*metropolitai*) paid at the reduced rate, and slaves of *Aigyptioi* ineligible for the reduced rate paid at the full rate. Slave ownership was concentrated in the privileged social groups, primarily reflecting their generally greater wealth; but this Roman discount for elite groups must have encouraged them to adopt Roman patterns of male slave ownership, for example as business agents. The position of freedmen, especially the slaves of Roman citizens freed under the *vindicta* procedure and thus themselves becoming full Roman citizens, will be discussed in **6.6**.[36]

The distinction between higher- and lower-status people, the 'more honourable' (*honestiores*) and 'more lowly' (*humiliores*), which began developing from the second century CE, involved the erosion of the status of the poor freeborn Roman citizen population and their progressive assimilation with their provincial counterparts, culminating with Caracalla's universal grant of Roman citizenship in 212. Honour, signified for example by exemption from physical punishments, was effectively reserved for the urban elites in Egypt as elsewhere in the empire, and the slaves and freedmen of these elites acquired honour and social standing from their masters which placed them above the freeborn peasantry in the social hierarchy. The increasing stratification of society in Late Roman times certainly widened the honour gap between those at the top and those at the bottom, but there is no evidence that this widening affected slaves any more than lower-status free people.

36 Straus 2009, discussing Zelnick-Abramovitz 2005; Mouritsen 2011; Roth 2011; Gonzales 2008; M. J. Perry 2014.

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1.5.4. Further aspects of the dishonouring of slaves

1.5.4.1. Reputation

In Roman law, damage to slaves by third parties involved more than a matter of the owner claiming compensation for any pecuniary loss. Damage to a slave's reputation inflicted harm on that of the master, as showing a lack of respect; for this he could sue for compensation, besides any physical harm to his property.[37] Whether there is any parallel to this in other periods is hard to say. Could slaves in Egypt, in any period, have had any independent reputation separate from that of their master? Evidence is scarce. Obviously, some slaves were trusted by their masters more than others, sometimes being given significant responsibilities (e.g. **156**). But this tells us nothing about any independent reputation, which may in any event have been limited to a small number of acquaintances. Most free people were also probably known to relatively few and had no reputation to speak of.

1.5.4.2. The dehumanising effects of being put on sale

The very experience of being sold is a sharp reminder to the enslaved person of their position in the world. But the physical process involved in sale could also have psychological effects. In the Roman world, the Edict of the Aediles prescribed a process that involved the slave being inspected naked (cf. Seneca, *Ep.* 80.9), with a placard stating that they were free of diseases and defects, including being a runaway, loiterer on errands, criminal, and had no history of attempting suicide. The experience of this display was surely humiliating.[38] Several papyrus slave sales reflect this Roman procedure in the terminology in which the formulaic language of the contract guarantees freedom from defects, for example **211** and **246**. There are also instances in which we learn that a slave had been sold repeatedly, also surely a disturbing ritual (e.g. **196**).[39] Most of our documents record private sales between individuals. This was perhaps less traumatic than a public auction, but hardly less disruptive for a slave's life.

Even for relatively well-treated, 'house-born' slaves, the threat of possibly being put on sale ever loomed over them. The divination text known as the *Sortes Astrampsychi* includes among its questions, 'Am I going to be sold?', and a range of possible responses one might receive, few of which are reassuring![40]

37 Du Plessis 2013: 163; see also Perry 2015.

38 Bradley 1992; Hughes 2006.

39 Benaissa 2010.

40 Naether 2010.

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Where you'll be purchased, you'll have regrets.
You won't be sold just yet, but it won't benefit you.
You won't be sold to your benefit.
You won't be sold, but you'll be set free with a bequest.
You won't be sold. It won't benefit you. Stand fast.
You'll be purchased and it will go well for you with those to whom you're sold.
You'll be sold and you'll be set free.
You'll be sold and you'll be sorry when you don't profit at all.
You'll be sold, but not just yet.

1.5.4.3. Loss of sexual autonomy

It was taken for granted in Greek and Roman society that both female and male slaves were at the sexual disposal of their master and his sons, and such use of slaves incurred no social opprobrium, although it may well have created tensions within families.[41] Offspring born to female slaves from these relationships could be exposed (see **5.3**), or raised as slaves, since in Greek and Roman law, children always followed the mother's status, with or without any recognition of their natal relationship to the master. A similar practice is implied in the pharaonic period by the Adoption Papyrus (**51**). But in practice, there would be no problem, if it were wished, in surreptitiously treating such children as the legitimate offspring of the master and his wife, an especially attractive option if the marriage had not proved fertile, but a practice arguably more widespread than only in cases of infertility; it might help explain various anomalies in the census records, such as the implausibly high frequency of twins. Whether this was really a common practice is hard to say, however. In any event, the high proportion of women among slaves, already from the pharaonic period on, certainly favoured reproduction of the servile population through births to slave women, and concubinage was widespread in the society of Islamic Egypt (**7.4.3**).

Slaves' sexual activities, and especially female slaves' reproductive capacity, were minutely controlled by their owners, in their own interest and profit; perhaps the most dehumanising of all aspects of slavery is the deprivation of all control over the slave's own body. As Kyle Harper put it, 'The place of slavery in the sexual landscape of classical antiquity could hardly be overestimated.'[42] The control of

41 On slaves and sexuality, see the edited collection Kamen and Marshall 2021.
42 Harper 2012: 368.

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reproduction and women's sexual activities was not, of course, only a feature of slavery; it was a widespread phenomenon of ancient societies.

Prostitutes in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods were normally slaves, although their status may not be made transparent in documents; we can see the risks to which they were exposed, especially in the recently found ostraca from the Eastern Desert forts (**230**), and less explicitly also in the Koptos tariff and receipts for the tax on prostitutes.[43] The brutal realities of their situation are visible in the letter of a resident of one of the desert forts to another: 'If it weren't for me, no one would have rented this girl to the fort. But I did her guardian a good turn so that he could get his six staters. And she abused me as if I were not human. I took her to the officer in charge and she ate and drank for a whole hour.' So, Ariston said: 'Off you go, sleep with Panouris. I do my thing to her by force' (*O.Krok*. 2.214, reign of Trajan). We do not seem to have comparable evidence for periods before the Ptolemaic or after the Roman. *P.Count* 3.91 (229 BCE), a tax register compiled by occupation, simply lists *hetairai*, using a classical Greek term for prostitute, but gives no indication of their status. Lots of dancers also appear, but again their status is unclear.

Mistress–slave sexual relationships were potentially problematic, infringing the social norm that respectable women should not marry their social inferiors; the documentary evidence from the Roman period for such marriages suggests that the women involved were often themselves former slaves.[44] The *s.c. Claudianum* (52 CE) stated that a freeborn woman living in *contubernium* (an informal union) with someone else's slave herself became the slave of the same master or became his freedwoman, if the master had consented to the union, and their children were slaves; but the intention was apparently less to restrict unions between male slaves and freeborn women as such[45] than to ensure that the children of such unions remained slaves. It was thus especially directed at the unions of freeborn women with imperial slaves, but the law, with amendments, remained in force until Justinian's reign.

Social reservations about such unions in Greek and Roman culture do not appear to have come from concern about any threat posed by male slaves' virility to the women of the household; this silence stands in striking contrast to the perceived or at least claimed threat from Black (former) slaves in the United States. Literary representations of sex between slave and mistress present the slave

43 Bagnall 1991; Flemming 1999; McGinn 2004; Freu 2009; Cuvigny 2010, 2021: 375–388.

44 Evans-Grubbs 1993; Harper 2010b.

45 *Pace* Edmondson 2011: 351.

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more as the victim of the mistress's sexual voracity than as the initiator of such contact.[46]

1.5.5. Naming slaves

Evidence from the New Kingdom suggests that enslaved captives were typically renamed (**2.9**). The slave named Hetel-Kush ('Kush is beaten') in **31** is an obvious example. These names sometimes seem abnormal, even though they have Egyptian etymologies. It is hard to know how common this practice of renaming captives was across the span of time covered in this book, but it is likely that it was normal; there is one such case explicitly mentioned as late as the seventh century CE, in which a 'Moorish' slave named Atalous sold by Aithiopian traders was renamed Eutychia ('Lucky') (**247**). It certainly seems highly likely that unfamiliar Semitic or Nubian names would normally have been replaced by more familiar ones, whether Egyptian or Greek. There has been much discussion about the naming of slaves in Greek and Roman society, and in particular as to whether there are distinctive slave names.[47] Names might express a slave's ethnic origin, but one cannot take that for granted; such ethnic names are particularly common at Athens, and the Aramaic papyri show an interesting variety of ethnic characteristics (**3.3.4**), including Iranian and Anatolian. But it is far from certain that these are to be taken at face value.

Names might also refer to physical characteristics, but names such as 'Blackie' (Melas/Melainis in Greek, or Kame in Egyptian) are not obviously servile, although Melainis in **163a** is a slave. More common are names expressing desirable qualities in slaves. These might be aspirational, such as Kerdon = 'Profit', Eutychia = 'Lucky' (as in the case above; cf. **7.4.1** for an Arabic parallel), Eudaimon/Eudaimonis = Felix ('Happy'), or the like.[48] They might also be more specific, such as Philokyrios ('Master-loving'), embedding hope for compliant behaviour, or refer to hoped-for charm and sexual desirability. Names formed from the root of the name of the goddess of love, Aphrodite, and her son Eros are particularly common, and not only for women. Probably most such names were given to those born in the house, although the seventh-century example already mentioned shows that they could be given at the time of purchase. But not all slaves have obviously distinctive names, and we find in the Ptolemaic period an example of a household with separate groups of slaves, one with Egyptian names

46 Herondas, *Mime* 5 (trans. in *Women and Society* no. 289). Todd 2013 and Parker 2007 explore possible reasons for this lack of concern. See also Fountoulakis 2007.

47 Vlassopoulos 2010; Bodel 2003; Solin 2001; Lewis 2017b.

48 For Threptos ('Foundling') as a personal name, see Thomas 2005.

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and the other with Greek names (**138**), probably with different types of work. There is nothing in this case to suggest specifically servile naming. In **144**, on the other hand, the five slave names given have a distinctly servile cast.

The repertory of Greek names at Rome, which to a very considerable degree belonged to slaves and freedmen, is a telling signal. Of the ten most common names, Eros, Onesimos ('Useful'), Elpis ('Hope'), Tyche ('Luck'), Eutyches, and Eutychos ('Lucky') are typical of the genre. In the next ten, Trophimos ('Young Master'), Epaphroditos ('Charming'), Eutychia, and Abaskantos ('Untouched by the evil eye') may also surely be attributed to the same cast of mind.[49] No systematic study has so far explored this repertory for Roman Egypt, which would begin with an updating of the index of slave names given by Bieżuńska-Małowist.[50] It would reveal a pattern very similar to that found in the inscriptions of Rome.

1.6. Ways of accessing the ancient slave's experience

Perhaps the hardest question of all is to what extent our sources offer information on what slaves themselves thought about being slaves or how they attempted to shape their experience within the constraints imposed by their status. It is nearly as difficult to know what their owners and other people thought about slaves and how they treated them. Our evidence from the ancient world for such subjects is incomparably poorer than it is for New World slave states, particularly in the lack of autobiographies and letters; there is no ancient counterpart to the *Autobiography of Frederick Douglass*. We must also reckon with our own limitations; our moral judgements are not objective, and our own presuppositions, strongly affected by more recent slave societies, inevitably colour our answers to questions about subjective matters.[51]

1.6.1. Divining the ancient slave's experience

That being a slave or falling into slavery was an evil to be avoided by any free person who was not totally desperate is perhaps obvious enough, although it might be advantageous to become an imperial freedman.[52] And fear of enslavement hardly needs documenting (its appearance in a list of things to be feared, *SB* 24.16047, 3rd–4th century CE, is an example). A prospective owner might well

49 Solin 1982: iii, 1439.
50 Bieżuńska-Małowist 1977: 171–177.
51 Bell and Ramsby 2012, reviewed by Urbainczyk 2013.
52 Bagnall 2007: 192–193.

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consult an oracle to ask if it was a good idea (for whatever reason) to buy a slave (*P.Oxy.* 8.1149, 2nd century CE). But how did those already enslaved see things? For this the evidence is scantier. The *Sortes Astrampsychi* and other oracular texts often mention slaves and slavery in telling ways, although it may be questioned whether they give us information not either obvious or well-represented elsewhere. As already noted, the *Sortes Astrampsychi* anticipates questions from slaves: Will I be freed from servitude? Am I going to be sold? It also has questions from owners of runaway slaves: Will I find the fugitive? Will the fugitive escape my detection? Similarly, ancient works on the interpretation of dreams refer to slaves.[53]

Slavery is, however, strikingly absent from the large corpus of Greek magical papyri. The vocabulary of slavery appears there in terms consistent with the broader sense of domination for *doulos* and its cognates already mentioned above, as the magician tries to 'enslave' the object of the spell or someone speaks of himself as a 'slave' of a god. But slavery itself does not feature in the spells.[54]

1.6.2. Archaeological evidence for Egyptian slavery

Given the extensive excavations and surveys of Egyptian sites carried out over many decades, one might hope to find substantial evidence from archaeology for slavery in Egypt. But this is not the case; this evidence is mainly conspicuous in its absence. The recent discovery of iron shackles at the Ptolemaic mining site of Ghozza in the Eastern Desert (see Fig. 5.4 below), however, suggests that more evidence may yet come to light. From other parts of the Roman Empire we have more, though until recently it was often overlooked.[55] This evidence includes slave collars; possibly slave markets, though interpretation of these is questionable;[56] and slave barracks,[57] whether as part of villas or in quarries and mines. Given the extensive material evidence from Mons Claudianus and other mining and quarrying sites in the Eastern Desert, the absence of remains of collars or barracks there may be significant. They are also absent from the Ptolemaic goldmines, despite Agatharchides' explicit reference (Diod. Sic. 3.12–13 = **169**) to harsh work conditions for convicts and prisoners of war.[58] It is in general difficult or impossible to distinguish barracks-like habitations used by slaves from similar

53 Annequin 2008; Hall 2011; Vlassopoulos 2021: 154–156.

54 Betz 1992, searchable online.

55 George 2011, cf. Morris 2011 and George 2013, esp. the introduction; cf. also Marshall 2014.

56 Trümper 2009 compares the later markets in Ottoman Cairo and elsewhere.

57 Cf. Fentress et al. 2011.

58 Brun et al. 2013.

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structures used by free persons (but cf. **170**). But the Ptolemaic shackles validate Agatharchides' statement and should keep us alert for further discoveries.

1.6.3. Tracing the choreography of slaves' daily life

A brilliant reconstruction of slaves' daily pathways through house and town, based on Pompeii, has been provided by Sandra Joshel and Lauren Petersen.[59] We do not have sufficient depth of information from anywhere in Egypt in any period to do something similar. The state-of-the-art excavations of Amheida (Trimithis), like others before them, have found no direct evidence of slaves' daily lives, although we know there were some present, because the ostraca refer to a few slaves and freedmen.[60] There are hints in the ostraca from the Eastern Desert referring to prostitutes, as mentioned above.[61] The women were hired for monthly tours of duty in a particular fort, where they would 'rotate' among the men stationed there, who shared the cost of the month's rental. Even after their monthly stint had ended, they might be subjected to harassment if they had not moved on to their next engagement (**231**). But what all this might mean in terms of a daily routine remains completely obscure to us.

1.6.4. Where did Egyptian slaves live?

Slaves' precise living conditions contributed to shaping how much autonomy of action they enjoyed and how much scope for interaction with fellow slaves they had. But we are rarely well informed on this point. There is no direct evidence for slave living spaces in the archaeological remains from the pharaonic period, for example, whether in large work groups or in private houses. Roman census returns suggest that most slaves lived as part of their owner's household, although it is difficult to distinguish between official membership in a household and actual physical habitation. Some lived in separate accommodation, as provided by the owner, and of course wealthier households often had multiple residences and properties (e.g. **138**, **158)**; slaves might well reside in a home not currently occupied by part or all of the owner's family or work on a distant estate. The best-attested case in point is Martilla, the housekeeper of the Philosarapis family's ancestral home at Tebtunis, who sent the family provisions while they

59 Joshel and Petersen 2014; see reviews, e.g. Binsfeld 2016, Ripat 2015.

60 Amheida: especially Boozer 2015. The ostraca (*O. Trim.* 1) attest four references to freedmen, one to a *paidiske*, two to *paidia* (*O. Trim.* 1.64: twenty loaves for the *paidia*).

61 Cuvigny 2021: 375–394.

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were in residence at Antinoopolis (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37 = **227**).[62] It is unusual, however, to have for the same household both formal evidence of slave status and the more informal documentation of residence and activities. These types of information appear in different sorts of texts, and only rarely do we have both types; we are thus left to infer legal status, often on an insecure basis. It should be remembered that Roman census records show that the majority of slaves lived in urban households; their numbers were far smaller in villages. But this tendency may reflect the greater urban concentration of wealthy families in the Roman period; the Ptolemaic lists seem to indicate a more significant presence of slaves in the larger Greek households in the Fayyum villages.[63] Arabic texts indicate that the possibility of living apart from the owner's household remained an element in post-Islamic conquest society (**286**).

1.6.5. Were slaves easily recognisable by their clothing, etc.?

Distinctive dress marked out many social groups at Rome, but the senate is said to have decided that slaves should not wear distinctive dress for fear of rebellion when the slaves saw how many they were (Seneca, *Clem.* 1.24.1).[64] The normal dress for Greek and Roman slaves was a tunic similar to those worn by the free poor (though wealthy masters might choose more expensive clothing to advertise their wealth: like everything else the slaves had, their clothing belonged to their masters, and it would reflect the slave's status within the household as well as the wealth and rank of the master).[65] No Egyptian grave so far has been identified as that of a slave, and thus grave goods found in excavations cannot give us any better idea of what slaves wore. This is not surprising, as only people of means could afford extensive funerary provision. Nor are we aware of any textual evidence specific to slave clothing; such evidence as there is does not suggest garments any different from those worn by free persons (e.g. **162**).

1.6.6. Ethnicity and skin colour

The ethnicity of slaves was regularly recorded in Roman sale documents, not only for identification but because some peoples were believed to make better slaves than others (the only official context where ethnic origin was an issue in Roman

62 See also Bagnall 2007: 192 for Oxyrhynchite cases of living apart.

63 Clarysse and Thompson 2006: II, 262–267.

64 See especially George 2002; Webster 2010.

65 Justinian, *Digest* 34.23.2 (Ulpian, *ad Sabinum* 44), describes slaves' clothing as part of the household's possessions. We thank Thelma Thomas for this reference and discussion of the question of slave clothing.

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Egypt).[66] Skin colour and physical appearance, such as curly hair, were also frequently recorded in the Roman period, both for slaves and free persons, as part of their identification in legal documents; but no particular physical characteristics were perceived as especially associated with slavery. Nubians, Libyans, and Syrians were in any case common among the free indigenous Egyptian population as well as among slaves, and many ethnic groups came to Egypt as mercenaries and settled there (even Gauls (from Galatia)).[67] There was no particular ethnic group that was specifically and publicly associated with slave rather than free status. On the other hand, the long history of violent exploitation of neighbouring peoples as sources of slaves, at least from the pharaonic through the Ptolemaic period and perhaps to some degree beyond, may well have conditioned the Egyptian population to expect slaves to be Nubian or Syrian. If we had better evidence for the extent of emancipation in periods before the Roman, we might have a clearer sense of how far slave status was heritable. As it is, it is hard to say how far any ancestral origin would have remained visible after a couple of generations, particularly if Egyptian, and then Greek, owners fathered a large part of the offspring of enslaved women. The racial identity of the ancient Egyptians themselves has been a highly controversial academic issue, but it was clearly sufficiently diverse that again it would not have helped distinguish free from enslaved; there were Asiatic elements at least by the Middle Kingdom (**50**).[68]

A Greek and Latin literary trope is the ugly appearance of slaves, but in reality, physical beauty cannot have distinguished free men and women from slaves (although many slaves must have had restricted opportunities to take care of their appearance).[69] Handsome slaves (of either gender) were valued highly. In sum, slaves were not immediately recognisable as such unless they had been tattooed or otherwise marked (including by the marks of severe lashings); see **1.8** below.

1.6.7. The slave's experience of death[70]

Deaths of slaves are well-documented, especially by the 'death notifications' from the Roman period submitted for slaves (as well as free persons). These were important for owners above all because death ended the liability for the poll tax; it is therefore not surprising that it is mainly for male slaves that we find

66 Webster 2010; Rowlandson 2013, esp. 235.

67 Winnicki 2009.

68 Bard 1996; Brace et al. 1996; Bernasconi 2007; McCoskey 2012; Salem et al. 2014, arguing for a significant genetic difference between Sinai and the North African part of Egypt.

69 See further Wiedemann and Gardner 2002, in an issue of *Slavery & Abolition* devoted to slaves' bodies.

70 Brown 2009; cf. his 2008 study of death and slavery in Jamaica, and Gigli Piccardi 2003.

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such notices. An example is *P.Oxy.* 74.4998, a death notice for Vibius Publius and two male slaves registered at separate addresses. The declaration was submitted by the guardian or steward of the late Vibius Publius; it does not preserve exact dates of death for the three persons, and it could be that the three deaths were coincidental. But the editor points out that the date of the declaration, in the year 253/4, came during an epidemic and could reflect mortality from disease during this. Sometimes we get circumstantial detail about how a death occurred: in **222** (*Law and Legal Practice* 9.2.1), we hear of a young slave, Epaphroditos, who in 182 CE fell from the roof of a house at Senepta while watching castanet dancing.

In Italy, tombs of freedmen are numerous, and there are even some known for slaves.[71] Because of a lack of systematic excavation of cemeteries and perhaps differences in commemoration habits, we do not find these in Egypt. But some funerary commemorations survive, for example the epitaph of Valeria alias Thermouthis, a war captive freed after thirty-eight years of slavery.[72] There is also a verse epitaph for an Aithiopian (Nubian) slave.[73] Freedmen might receive a painted portrait attached to their mummy; an example is the portrait of Eutyches, freedman of Kasianos, now in the Metropolitan Museum of Art (**221**).[74]

Almost as significant for a slave was the death of their master. This might, on the positive side, be the occasion for them to be freed; there are many instances of emancipation at the master's death. From the Ptolemaic period, we have an example in **163**; from the Roman period, **216** preserves the will of Akousilaos, including emancipations, and provides 100 drachmas annually for his slaves and freedmen to celebrate his birthday with a banquet at his tomb. Roman freedmen and slaves were part of the family and could be buried in the family tomb. Whether this was true in the case of Egyptian families that were not Roman citizens we do not know. But the death of a master could instead be the occasion for coming under the power of a new and perhaps unwelcome owner, whether the heir or a new purchaser. We encounter a situation in which we can only imagine the slave's feelings with the case of Martilla at Tebtunis, who was inherited jointly by Herakleia's three sons at her death. She was pledged as security for a loan by one of them, to the evident displeasure of the other two heirs; but what Martilla herself felt is not recorded (*P.Fam.Tebt.* 37 (= **227**), 38, and 40).

71 Bruun 2015.

72 Valeria alias Thermouthis: Łukaszewicz 1989 = *SB* 20.15005 (TM 105093).

73 *I.Metr.* 26 (cf. Gigli Piccardi 2003) = **248**.

74 Bagnall and Worp 1981.

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1.7. The work of slaves: what did they do?[75]

Our understanding of the work of slaves in every period is limited by the nature of the evidence from the various eras, as well as the limits of our knowledge about gender divisions in labour. It is not always easy to distinguish the relative importance of gender and status in work. The pharaonic evidence in many cases involves agricultural labour, which is also attested in the first millennium BCE (**69**), but the numerical preponderance of women in the servile population suggests that however necessary slaves were as part of the workforce, the majority of field labourers were not slaves. Craft production, and particularly cloth manufacture by female slaves, also played an important part (**2.4**). And of course domestic service was also the lot of many slaves in smaller households. The Hebrew sources (Chapter 4) give prominence to the labour of Hebrews in construction. Some of the Aramaic sources stress the value of skilled craftsmen, but we cannot tell how far this reflects source bias (**3.3**; **80**, **81**).

In the Ptolemaic period, our knowledge is compromised by two related elements of the evidence. One is the overwhelming dominance of our documentation of slavery by the possessions of the finance minister Apollonios in the mid-third century BCE, known through the archive of his agent Zenon. Apollonios' household, which included not only his base in Alexandria but also a very extensive estate in the Fayyum and elsewhere, as well as a textile production facility in Memphis, was probably the largest in Egypt outside that of the royal court, so it is in no way indicative of the rest of society. And, second, the unending debates over the terminology used for slaves and the fact that our documentation is for the most part not concerned with technical vocabulary, have made it hard to be sure at times which individuals were slaves and which were free.

Within the Zenon archive, we see a small number of enslaved people who spend at least part of their effort in agriculture, although their work may not have been entirely devoted to that sphere. There is clear evidence (**152**, **154**) that slaves worked alongside free persons in some agricultural contexts. A modest number of female slaves were engaged in textile production in the Memphite workshop.[76] And many slaves seem to have belonged to the broad domain that we would call the household.

This pattern cannot be extrapolated to Ptolemaic society as a whole. Most people did not have industrial enterprises of the sort Apollonios possessed. There is almost no evidence at all for slaves in agriculture outside the Zenon archive. A hint of the situation may be seen in the census tax registers from third-century

75 The fundamental accounts of this subject are Bieżuńska-Małowist 1974: 59–83 and 1977: 73–108.

76 E.g. **155**, **156**. Also for textiles see *BGU* 10.1942 = *C.Ptol.Sklav*. 2.210 = TM 5797.

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Fayyum, in which almost all slave-owning households were Greek, and of the twenty-three households owning any slaves at all – only a seventh of those listed – fourteen had just one slave, and another four had two slaves. These are not the numbers to staff large farms, or large workshops either. Rather, they speak to a predominantly domestic character for slavery.

But that is only part of the answer; we have to ask, what does 'domestic' mean? As with so many things, it depends on the nature of the household. In a vast organisation such as the household of Apollonios, there would be specialists of all kinds: cooks, masseurs, doormen, porters, entertainers, various types of artisan, and so on, as well as cleaners of every description. Much of the workforce was effectively running errands, taking mail or getting it, buying or selling things, and so forth. Some male slaves certainly had higher-level responsibilities than most, but it is often difficult to know the status of some of the individuals with managerial portfolios who appear in the texts with only their names.

In households with one slave, and that one usually female (ten of the fourteen one-slave households in the census records), such specialisation was not possible. The slave undoubtedly did whatever the owners wanted, furnishing all sorts of domestic services from shopping, in the larger towns, to sex. Because most textile production was carried out in the house rather than on an industrial scale, slaves, especially female slaves, undoubtedly spent much of their time spinning and weaving, just as free women did.

Evidence for slave labour in mines and quarries under the Ptolemies has been scarce, and most quarrymen appear to be free professionals. But the term 'free quarrymen' suggests that some were not free (cf. **171**), and the recent discovery of slave manacles (see Fig. 5.4 below) at the Eastern Desert mining village of Ghozza shows that there were slaves alongside the free miners who worked there.

For the Roman period, our sources for slaves' work are much more diverse, with no central archive comparable to that of Zenon to provide both depth and distortion. Scholars have tended to think that the terminology for slaves in Roman documents is more precise, but this is far from certain. The growth of private landholding in the Roman period, and particularly the increasing numbers of bigger estates (albeit largely made up of smaller parcels) in the hands of the urban upper classes, may have led to rising use of slave labour in agriculture. But in most cases the accounts of such estates are unconcerned with the legal status of the workers mentioned; as a result, most such dossiers have generated more debate than clarity. Arguments based on whether workers receive pay are of little value when we do not know the scope of the few accounts that we have. It does not appear that distinguishing free from slave labour was important in estate record-keeping. After a lengthy discussion, Bieżuńska-Małowist concluded

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that our knowledge of slaves directly employed in agriculture is as slender as it is uncertain.[77] We can, perhaps, say that slaves were used more in specialist roles, particularly in high-value viticulture or orchards, than in ordinary field work.

There is a fair amount of evidence for slaves used in artisanal roles, but this is scattered and hardly quantifiable. Most of it concerns the textile industry, with both men and women employed in weaving and related tasks, for which professional training was necessary. Nonetheless, this artisanal evidence is also 'minimal' in Bieżuńska-Małowist's view. As with agriculture, one senses that among the upper classes there was some interest in having slaves trained in high-value skills, such as stenography or medicine, for which literacy would be needed. Pliny the Younger's Egyptian doctor Harpokras (*Ep.* 10.5–7) is a well-known case in point. Such specialists were common enough in Roman slavery. But in all likelihood most such slaves in Roman Egypt were in Alexandria and therefore very rarely documented in the surviving evidence. Some slaves were also entertainers, such as dancers or musicians, and would have been trained in the requisite skills.

In ancient literature, entertainers are commonly regarded as of dishonourable status, the next thing to prostitutes. And, as already noted, the papyri and ostraca, in contrast to other occupations, do give us quite a lot of mentions of slaves working as prostitutes. The evidence has been much increased in recent years by publication of ostraca from the small forts in the Eastern Desert, where, as already noted, the (male) inhabitants of the fort, both soldiers and civilians, would collectively hire a woman for a month from her pimp at a fixed price; she was then available to all of the men in the fort during that month, before (usually) moving on to another fort.[78] Like nearly everything else in the desert, this activity was taxed by the Roman government. In many cases elsewhere, it is difficult to be certain of the status of prostitutes, but it seems that they were predominantly enslaved.

Given the predominantly female composition of the enslaved population in the Roman period, as also under the Ptolemies, and the limited evidence for specialised occupations, it has been easy to conclude that most slaves worked in a domestic context. As Bieżuńska-Małowist points out, however, much of what we think of as organisational or occupational work today was in antiquity carried out in the household. This is true for agriculture and weaving, and it is true for much else. Any single slave might perform a wide variety of tasks. The grandest aristocratic households in Roman Alexandria, with perhaps several dozen or even a hundred slaves, were, like Apollonios' establishment and aristocratic households

77 Bieżuńska-Małowist 1977: 83.
78 Cuvigny 2021: 375–394.

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at Rome, exceptions in their ability to use slaves in specialised ways; the smaller the household, the greater the diversity of roles a single slave might have to perform. In wealthy families, slaves might be used to help manage agricultural or other business interests, also a common Roman pattern. But the difficulties that we have discussed in ascertaining the legal status of many individuals mentioned in accounts or letters make it hard to be sure whether we are actually seeing slave managers at work or instead freeborn persons or freedmen. The Arabic texts, which in many ways offer richer detail about the social existence of enslaved persons than those of the Roman and Late Roman periods, are, perhaps by way of trade-off, relatively uninformative about slaves' work, in part because slave status is often invisible in work contexts (**7.4.4**).

1.8. Punishment and resistance

The physical persons of slaves were often treated differently from those of free persons, but not necessarily. We can observe this already in the New Kingdom, where no difference can be seen in the use of interrogation under torture (**42**). On the other hand, skilled slaves who fled during a disturbance under Persian rule were not to be maltreated on their return (**79**). The more severe treatment of slaves was codified in law in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods. There is not a great deal of documentary evidence for actual practice, but normative texts of the Ptolemaic period set out some of the rules. From **131** (*Law and Legal Practice* 9.1.1: city laws, but probably not of Alexandria) we learn that slaves were allowed to act as witnesses in trials, but judges could decide to apply torture, which was not the case with free persons. This text also shows that the slave's liability to punishment was complicated by whether the slave was acting on the master's instruction or without his knowledge (cols. 1.27–2.38).[79] Penalties inflicted on slaves included flogging and branding in some cases – again, punishments not meted out to free persons by these laws. This was also true in Alexandria: in cases where free persons paid a fine, a slave was punished by flogging (*P.Hal.* 1: excerpts at **132**, a fuller translation in *Law and Legal Practice* 9.1.2). For the Roman period, *P.Oxy.* 9.1186 (4th century CE) tells us that whipping free men was forbidden; for slaves it was disapproved of but permitted. But flogging was equally possible for slaves and low-status free persons in pharaonic Egypt, and in Roman times the protection of lower-status free persons was gradually eroded.

79 On corporal punishment of both free men and slaves in Ptolemaic Egypt (and its pharaonic precedents), see Legras 2011b. On punishment of slaves in Roman law generally: Watson 1987: 115–133; in Roman Egypt, Straus 2015.

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Branding of slaves was seen as a degrading punishment, and there is no evidence for it in the papyri of the first millennia BCE and CE; indeed, the branding of humans in antiquity was rare.[80] But branding of enslaved captives in order to mark ownership is attested in the later New Kingdom in the Medinet Habu reliefs (and see **29**), and its use later cannot be excluded (**3.3.2**).[81] Tattooing was much more common where a permanent mark was desired, and there is evidence for its use as a punitive measure, but direct Egyptian evidence is again scarce.[82] Under Roman law (the *lex Aelia Sentia*), slaves who had been punished by being put in chains (or branded or tortured) became members of a class called *dediticii* (analogous to captives in war), debarred from ever receiving Roman citizen or Latin status even if subsequently manumitted (Gaius, *Inst.* 1.13).[83] *The Gnomon of the Idios Logos* (para. 20; see **185**) prohibited former slaves who had ever been put in chains from receiving legacies, even if later freed. On a slave's sale, any prior punishment by chaining (even temporarily) had to be formally disclosed, along with other defects (including having run away; see below) and their value was diminished in consequence; we have no papyrus sale documents that mention chaining, however. As noted above (**1.6.2**), we also lack archaeological evidence from Roman Egypt of chains for slaves or slave barracks such as can be found in western provinces.[84] But that does not mean that fetters were not used at times, such as in transporting slaves, as we find in the pharaonic period (**31**).

Not surprisingly, our documents provide a fair amount of evidence for what slave owners and the authorities considered delinquency, but which we might rather categorise as resistance.[85] There is good evidence for runaways in the Aramaic papyri (**78–79**). Runaways are also well documented in the Zenon archive and in other Ptolemaic Greek texts. There were provisions for official help in pursuing them, as we see especially in *P.Harr.* 1.62[86] and *UPZ* 1.141 (see **140**, **159–162**).[87] Papyrus slave sale documents sometimes refer to a tendency to run away under the 'latent defect' clause.[88] Slaves could of course engage in other forms of resistance, such as theft from their masters and, more generally, a failure to do what they were told. *P.Oxy.Hels.* 26, a petition about an uncooperative slave (Oxyrhynchos, 296 CE), gives an idea of how obligations – at least as perceived

80 Jones 1987: 141.

81 Cf. Vlassopoulos 2021: 97 n. 21.

82 Kamen 2010, citing earlier bibliography; DuBois 2003; Reiner 2004; Robinson 2005. See also Jones 1987 and Cuvigny 2021: 535–536.

83 See especially Roth 2011; cf. Aldhouse-Green 2004.

84 Thompson 1993, 2003; Webster 2005.

85 Cf. Bradley 1990 and 2011; Straus 2014.

86 Llewelyn 1997; Fuhrmann 2011: 21–44.

87 Cf. Reiner 2004.

88 Urbanik 2010.

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by owners – might be resisted. In that case it is not even clear if the petitioners are being truthful about the slave's status, or if in fact the person complained about may now have been manumitted (see *Women and Society* 144). Runaways continue to be a problem for their owners right into the Islamic period (**7.4.4**).

A final note on resistance: in the Ptolemaic and Roman periods, slaves were in general the responsibility of their masters, who could be held liable for harm done by them (see, e.g. **131**). Slaves thus brought not only benefits but also risks to their owners. Moreover, slaves often knew quite a lot about their masters' business dealings, not all of which may have been legitimate. That knowledge, too, was a potential risk for their owners; slaves could turn informers (see **137**).

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